

Thomas Jefferson to Caesar A. Rodney, June 14, 1802, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO CÆSAR A. RODNEY J. MSS.

Washington, June 14, 1802.

Dear Sir, —I am later in acknowledging the receipt of your favor of May 16 because it found me at Monticello just on my departure from that place. Since my arrival here I have been in the constant hope of seeing Mr. Beckley and endeavoring to procure from his office a copy of the journals of the H. of Rep. for you. I do not know that they can be had any where else. His confinement by the remains of a fit of the gout has hitherto prevented my object, but I shall keep it in view. I have received two addresses from meetings of democratic republicans at Dover, praying the removal of Alien McLane. One of them was forwarded by Govr. Hall. The grounds are stated so generally that I cannot judge from thence whether he has done anything deserving removal since his former trial and acquittal, certainly nothing beyond that should be brought up a second time. I write this to you confidentially and ask the favor of you to explain to me the real foundation of these applications. If he has been active in electioneering in favor of those who wish to subvert the present order of things, it would be a serious circumstance. I do not mean as to giving his personal vote, in which he ought not to be controuled; but as to using his influence (which necessarily includes his official influence) to sway the votes of others. I withhold answering these applications till I hear from you, and may do it on ground which will not fail me. I hope you are fixed on as the republican candidate at the ensuing election for Congress. Accept assurances of my great esteem and respect.¹

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1 On this matter of McLane, Jefferson further wrote to Rodney.

“ Washington June 24, 1802.

“ Dear Sir,—Your favor of the 19th and 21st was received last night. The contents of it shall be inviolably kept to myself. I shall advise with my constitutional counsellors on the application relative to Mr. McLane. Some considerations occur at once. That a trial and acquittal, where both parties are fully heard, should be deemed conclusive; that on any subsequent complaint it cannot be regular to look to anything farther back than the trial: that to do this would expose us to a charge of inconsistency which could do great injury to the republican cause; that he could not be removed only on the principle of a general removal of all federalists, a principle never yet avowed by anyone: that nothing short of this would reach him because his acquittal puts him on better ground than others. There may be considerations however opposed to these, and they shall have their weight. I do not see anything charged in the papers subsequent to his former trial. Electioneering activity subsequent to that would be deemed serious. But I presume he is passive in that way. Of those who may justly claim attention in the appointment of offices, could not the places of commissioners of bankruptcy be of some avail? I have never seen, nor before heard of the piece called *Love and Madness* in which you mention Logan's speech to be inserted. And should be glad to see it if you have the book. We shall leave this the 22nd of July to pass the two sickly months of Aug. & Sept. somewhere off of the tide waters; myself at Monticello of course. I mention this because you speak of being here in August, and I should regret my absence. I wish your visit could rather be immediate: and with the present rapidity of the stage, a flying trip from Wilmington to this place is nothing. Accept assurances of my great esteem and respect.”

Jefferson also wrote to Governor Hall:

“ Washington, July 6, 1802.

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“* * * When I first came into the administration complaints were exhibited against Col. McLane, and an inquiry immediately directed to be made into his conduct. Every opportunity, which could be desired, was given on both sides to the producing of testimony, and on a very full investigation he was finally acquitted. He had a right to consider that acquittal as a bar to everything anterior; and certainly according to sound principles it must be so considered. I am persuaded that the republican citizens who have concurred in these addresses would be as incapable of wishing me to do anything which should bring a just censure on the administration, as I should be from yielding to such a wish. We have no interests nor passions different from those of our fellow citizens. We have the same object, the success of representative government. Nor are we acting for ourselves alone, but for the whole human race. The event of our experiment is to shew whether man can be trusted with self-government. The eyes of suffering humanity are fixed on us with anxiety as their only hope, and on such a theatre for such a cause we must suppress all smaller passions and local considerations. The leaders of federalism say that man can not be trusted with his own government. We must do no act which shall replace them in the direction of the experiment. We must not by any departure from principle, disgust the mass of our fellow citizens who have confided to us this interesting cause. If, since the date of the acquittal, Col. McLane has done any new act inconsistent with his duty as an officer, or as an agent of the administration, this would be legitimate ground for new inquiry, into which I should consider myself as free to enter. A particular fact of this kind is charged in the addresses, but only that he is disagreeable to the citizens of the place. This would be among the proper considerations On the appointment of an office, and ought, before appointment to have weight. But after many years possession of an office, and an exact discharge of its duties, a discharge for this reason would not be approved by those beyond the pale of his unpopularity.

“Our opponents are so disposed to make a malignant use of whatever comes from me, to torture every word into meanings never meant in order to [*illegible*] their own passions and principles, that I must ask the favor of you to communicate verbally the sentiments of this

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letter to those who forwarded their addresses through you, not permitting the letter or any copy to go out of your hands. I pray you to accept assurances of my high consideration and respect.”

P. S. Will you also be so good as to recommend to me 4. commissioners of bankruptcy for Wilmington and Newcastle, Two should be lawyers and two merchants, all republicans. If one resides in Newcastle and three in Wilmington it would be desirable: but this circumstance must yield to respectability of character, which is essential.